



DAILY CAMERA

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EPA to Honor Boulder Programs

Commuting options in district set a 'national standard of excellence'

by **Mary Butler**

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First there was the Eco Pass program, born 11 years ago. Then there was the Hop circulator bus, which came three years later. The stream of ideas to keep a lid on Boulder's traffic congestion has kept coming and continues to turn heads around the nation.

The Environmental Protection Agency is naming downtown Boulder as the nation's first business district to set a "national standard of excellence" in providing commuter benefits to its more than 10,000 employees.

"So much of what Boulder has done is really innovative," said Jeffra Rockwell, who's pushing the EPA's Commuter Choice initiative efforts. "We're hoping that by putting the city out there as a model of 'this is something you can do, too,' we'll get other localities to do something similar."

Last year, the EPA and the Department of Transportation introduced the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. The voluntary program rewards businesses through tax breaks for making it easy for workers to carpool, ride bicycles, walk or take buses and trains to work.

The efforts of more than 1,000 downtown businesses—which include providing commuter amenities such as bike

lockers, showers and flexible work schedules—will be profiled on the EPA's Commuter Choice Web site, www.commuterchoice.gov, and held up for other cities to emulate.

Also recognized will be the city's Eco Pass program, which dedicates parking meter proceeds to buying bus passes for downtown employees.

On Wednesday, EPA assistant administrator Jeff Holmstead will be in Denver to recognize the region's Commuter Choice employers and announce the agency's decision to name Boulder as its first Commuter Choice district.

The EPA is also considering naming the FlatIron Improvement District, including FlatIron Crossing mall and adjacent shopping areas, as a Commuter Choice district. The district provides Eco Passes to about 3,600 employees.

Initiative promoters chose the Denver-Boulder area as one of three areas in the nation to focus their efforts on, based on initial response to the year-old program. The other two areas are San Francisco and Philadelphia. Prior to the inclusion of 1,000 downtown Boulder businesses, 46 of the 300 companies nationwide already participating in the program were in Colorado, with 15 of the 46 in Boulder.

Every Commuter Choice employer must offer to subsidize a bus or vanpool

pass, pay employees not to drive to work or offer a telecommuting program that reduces monthly commute trips by at least 6 percent. Other requirements include making a commitment that at least 14 percent of employees do not drive alone to work and agreeing to annually report to the EPA about the company's commuter programs.

The desired result is cleaner air and reduced global warming through fewer automobile emissions.

Boulder's approach to managing traffic—which includes metering parking, partnering in circulator bus programs and providing enticements to carpool, bike, bus and walk rather than drive alone to work—surpasses all the requirements.

"The downtown district really has been a top-notch effort since early '90s, when it really got serious about programs like the Eco Pass and encouraging people to use other modes, in particular, their focus was encouraging employees to get downtown other ways," said Tracy Winfree, city transportation director.

"It was a good business move because it opens up parking for customers... and of course downtown is a wonderful, vibrant place to be."